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2 CIA employees reportedly rode downed copter

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WASHINGTON — A helicopter carrying two employees of the Central Intelligence Agency was shot down last month by Nicaraguan forces who were attacking "contra" rebel camps in Honduras, U.S. intelligence sources disclosed yesterday.

The sources said one of the CIA employees, the pilot of the helicopter, was badly injured and later was flown out of Honduras for medical treatment in the United States. The sources said that he may lose a leg as a result of his wounds.

The other employee, the co-pilot, and a Honduran air force officer accompanying the "intelligence mission" were unhurt, the sources said. They did not identify the CIA employees, but other officials said that they are not Americans and might have been working for the CIA on contract.

State Department spokesman Charles Redman confirmed that a helicopter belonging to Honduras had been shot down but said that no Americans were aboard. He also told reporters at the department's daily briefing that there were no casual-

ties.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said the agency would not comment on intelligence matters.

U.S. intelligence sources said the latest episode occurred about 8 miles from the Nicaraguan border March 20, the day the White House began to receive reports from the contras that a sizable force of Nicaraguan soldiers had entered Honduras to attack their camps.

The CIA dispatched the helicopter on an intelligence-gathering mission to verify the contras' claims, the sources said.

"They were on an intelligence mission and were not involved in any military operation or giving the contras any tactical or strategic data to fight off the Sandinistas," one source said.

The distinction is important because congressional restrictions prohibit the CIA from providing the rebels with any military guidance but allow intelligence-collection or intelligence-sharing contacts with the contras.

The sources did not provide details but said that Sandinista ground fire hit the helicopter several times, forcing it down on a hillside.